

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

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CONFUCIUS HIS IMPACT ON CHINESE CULTURE AND THE “GREAT MAN THEORY OF HISTORY”

Grade Level

This lesson is intended for students in grades 6-8.

Purpose

To help students understand that one person can make a difference in history.

Concepts

- “Great Man Theory of History”: The idea held by European and American historians that great men (and women) drive history forward by leading nations, while the masses follow.
- Confucius (551-479 BCE): an itinerant scholar and philosopher, who has come to be thought of as China's greatest thinker. He believed that the early years of the Zhou dynasty (1100-256 BCE) were a high point of political and social harmony in China and based his ideas of a just government and society on this period. Confucius wandered with his followers from feudal state to feudal state trying to find a ruler who would adopt his ideas for reform, but he was ignored.
- It was not until the Han dynasty (206 BCE-CE 220) that an imperial civil service was created based on Confucius's teachings. This bureaucracy was to rule China for 2,000 years. Candidates had to memorize and be examined on the five books that comprised the Confucian classics, whose 500,000 words had to be learned by heart. The curriculum for this examination changed very little through the centuries.
- *Lun Yu*, or *Sayings*: A record of Confucius's sayings and conversations as recorded by his disciples and students; it is known in English as the *Analects*.
- Oral history: The tradition of passing down ideas from generation to generation by repeated telling, without ever writing them down.
- Northern Song dynasty: ruled China 960-1127
- Yuan dynasty: ruled China 1279-1368
- Ming dynasty: ruled China 1368-1644
- *Jen*: for Confucius the supreme human virtue, translated as "a sensitive concern for other human beings"
- *Li*: the Confucian concept of proper conduct as based on established patterns of ritual and etiquette

Key Ideas

- As seen in the example of Confucius, individuals can impact on history long after they are dead.
- Confucian ideals included leading a contemplative and reflective life, where people thought seriously about their responsibilities toward one another and toward the next generation. Students should think about what their role is in their family, in their classes, on their team, and they might wonder if they are taking that role seriously enough.
- Looking at Chinese artwork from different time periods can tell us how prevalent Confucian ideals were.
- When Jesuit missionaries translated the *Analects* into Latin in the 16th century, Confucius's ideas were introduced to Europeans and Americans, and they helped political leaders form new ideas about self-government.
- During the Tang dynasty, Confucius began to be worshiped as a deity and the emperor decreed that a Confucian temple be established in every province and country of the empire. Many of these still exist.
- Many scholars believe that the Chinese emphasis on education began with Confucius.

Materials

Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain, 960-985, CMA 1959.348

Lonely Retreat Overlooking a Misty Valley, 1630, CMA 1961.88

Meditative Visit to a Mountain Retreat, 1648, CMA 1962.42

Twelve Views of Tiger Hill, Suchou: The Pine Retreat, after 1490, CMA 1964.371.3

Twelve Views of Tiger Hill, Suchou: The Enlightened Stone Retreat, after 1490, CMA 1964.371.4

Clouds Visiting a Mountain Retreat, 1633, CMA 1971.19

A Scholar's Retreat amidst Autumn Trees, 1271-1368, CMA 1997.98

Freedman, Russell. *Confucius: The Golden Rule*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2002.
Pencils and notebooks

Procedure

1. As a homework assignment over a two-week period students will read *Confucius: The Golden Rule*. Students will discuss the main ideas in each chapter and write a one-page book review that must emphasize what they learned about Confucius's ideas.
2. Students will take notes on the concepts listed above and they will discuss how Confucius fits into the larger context of Chinese history and culture.
3. Students will divide into small groups (3-5) and examine each of the seven art objects listed above.
4. Students will write observations about how each piece might relate to Confucian ideals and each group will have a spokesperson report back to the rest of the group.

Evaluation

- A. Students will write an essay describing how Confucius's ideas about education, being reflective, and thinking are apparent in the seven pieces of art. Students will be required to cite specific examples from each piece.
- B. Students will take a quiz on *Confucius: The Golden Rule*.

Enrichment

- A. Students will write an I-search paper where they describe their own journey toward becoming an educated person.
- B. Students will present to the class examples of people who are making a difference in the world today as Confucius did 2,500 years ago.
- C. Students will make a list of things they can do in their lifetime to make a difference in the world.

Ohio State Standards Social Studies

6th Grade, People in Societies, Cultures #2

Compare world religions and belief systems focusing on geographic origins, founding leaders and teachings including: a. Buddhism; b. Christianity; c. Judaism; d. Hinduism; e. Islam.

7th Grade, People in Societies, Diffusion #4

Describe the cultural and scientific legacies of African, Greek, Roman, Chinese, Arab, and European civilizations

7th Grade, Social Studies Skills and Methods, Problem Solving #3

Establish guidelines, rules, and time lines for group work

This lesson plan was developed by Michael Sears, 7th grade teacher, Shaker Heights City Schools, Shaker Heights, Ohio